

**SITUATION REPORT NO. 1**  
**INCIDENT NO. 98-017**  
**DATE: March 31, 1998      TIME: 3:00 p.m.**

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer  
State Capitol  
Bismarck, ND 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Spring flooding – northeastern North Dakota.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: None reported.
3. DAMAGES: The Pembina and Park Rivers rose rapidly this past weekend as spring-like temperatures caused remaining snow in shelter belts and fields to melt in Walsh and Pembina Counties. Soils in these areas are extremely saturated due to wet conditions since 1993. This high moisture content is contributing to the runoff.

The National Weather Service (NWS) issued a revised Spring Snowmelt Flood Outlook report on Friday, March 27. The outlook reiterated earlier forecasts that moderate to major spring flooding could occur along the Pembina River, from the Canadian border to the river's confluence with the Red River. That outlook is based on current conditions and future normal precipitation and temperatures. Moderate flooding indicates that evacuation may be required, inundation of secondary roads may occur, and property may have to be relocated to a higher elevation. The NWS defines major flooding as a general term including "extensive inundation and property damage, usually characterized by the evacuation of people and livestock and the closure of both primary and secondary roads."

The National Weather Service reported that both the Pembina and Park Rivers crested above flood stage this past weekend. The Pembina River at Neche crested at 20.6 feet on March 29; flood stage is 18 feet. At Walhalla, the Pembina River reached 12 feet late March 29; flood stage is 11 feet. In Walsh County, the Park River rose to 12.91 feet on March 30; flood stage is 12 feet.

Although the Pembina River has begun a slow drop, the river is expected to crest again, possibly later this week, after snowmelt occurs in southern Manitoba. That snowmelt began on March 30. River gauges upstream in Canada indicate that additional snowmelt and runoff has begun entering the Pembina River. A height forecast for the second crest is not yet available.

On March 28 and 29, rivers in eastern Walsh County began moving out of their banks, flooding 12 miles of roadways and low-lying areas. Crews have blocked and signed flooded sites. Park River rises also caused minor flooding in the city park, a golf course and two low-lying streets in the city of Grafton.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: Public works departments, law enforcement agencies, communications centers, emergency management offices, fire and rescue, ambulance, city officials, county commissioners are contributing to flood preparedness and response efforts.

STATE: State Radio Communications, North Dakota Emergency Management, N.D. Game and Fish Department, N.D. State Water Commission and the N.D. Highway Patrol have provided support assistance to local authorities.

FEDERAL: National Weather Service, U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are providing technical support assistance.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: Residents in Pembina and Walsh Counties are participating in sandbagging efforts in their communities as part of flood preparedness efforts.

In Traill County, local church groups are providing meals to the families of the three men who are presumed to have drowned during a March 29 boating accident. Local clergy are providing

counseling services to the families.

Walsh County residents provided boats and meals for search and rescue teams looking for two individuals who have been missing since March 3. Their vehicle was found on a flooded Park River bridge.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: In response to the potential flood threat, officials in Pembina and Walsh Counties activated their local Emergency Operations Plans and reviewed flood preparedness and response plans. Public works and law enforcement monitored road conditions, blocking and signing flooded roads. County and city workers conducted inventories of sandbag and water pump supplies. Sandbags were filled and placed on standby or for use in low-lying areas. Cities plugged drains in low-lying areas. Emergency Management officials in both counties issued news releases advising motorists to use caution when traveling on flooded roads. Communities loaned sandbags to flood-threatened cities.

North Dakota Emergency Management requested technical assistance from the St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for Pembina County, where rising Pembina River waters are threatening the city of Neche, as well as rural areas. The USACE has provided technical assistance with evaluating the existing flood protection capability of the city of Neche, and identifying what measures the city needs to take to protect itself from the predicted flood elevation of 24 feet.

In Pembina County, flood coordinators were appointed for the cities of Walhalla and Neche. Pembina County public works employees were placed on standby to work as needed with sandbagging efforts.

A public health nurse gave tetanus shots to flood workers in the city of Neche.

In Walsh County, the city of Grafton placed extra personnel on duty during the past weekend to help with flood response activities.

A Fargo-based diver plugged a storm sewer drain in the city of Grafton. The drain had caused water to backup into the eastern third of the city.

In Traill County, three men apparently drowned during a boating accident on the Goose River on March 29. The three men were launching a boat when the engine stalled. Turbulent waters swept their boat over the Hillsboro Park dam, causing it to capsize. The Cass County Dive Team has provided assistance with search and recovery efforts, and area residents provided meals for the victims' families. The deaths are not attributed to minor spring flooding in the area, according to the Traill County Emergency Manager.

Walsh County search and rescue crews recovered the body of a rural Grafton woman on March 30, about three-quarters of a mile from where her vehicle was found earlier this month on a flooded Park River bridge. She and another individual were reported missing on March 3. A plane has been used to search the river and surrounding area to look for the second person, but to no avail. The Walsh County Sheriff's Office will continue to monitor the area and will resume the search after the river level drops. Cause of death has not been determined.

Emergency declarations were issued by the city of Grafton on March 27 and the city of Neche and Pembina County on March 17.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: None at this time, with the exception of continuing technical support.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: Local contractors are providing assistance with levee work and removal of ice jams.
9. OTHER: Situation Reports published by the N.D. Division of Emergency Management are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is: <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

---

Douglas C. Friez, State Director